THE ALLEGED

"PROGRESS IN THEOLOGY."

BY

DORUS CLARKE, D. D.

THE ALLEGED "PROGRESS IN THEOLOGY."

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

SUFFOLK NORTH ASSOCIATION

OF

CONGREGATIONAL MINISTERS,

AT CHELSEA, MASS., FEBRUARY 20, 1883,

BY DORUS CLARKE, D.D.

"*Whatever is true in theology is not new, and whatever is new is not true.*"

BOSTON:
LEE & SHEPARD, 47 FRANKLIN STREET.
NEW YORK:
CHARLES T. DILLINGHAM, 678 BROADWAY.
1883.

THE ALLEGED "PROGRESS IN THEOLOGY."

It has come to be a matter of frequent remark, that we live in an age of great "progress in theology," and that similar "progress" is hereafter to be expected. It is time, I think, to examine this theory, that we may ascertain what elements in it are true and what are false, so that we may know whether we are tending towards views of Scriptural truth which are really more intelligent and sound, or abandoning those which are correct for those which are doubtful and erroneous. If I mistake not, this opinion is held by some of the younger clergy of the present day, but is not concurred in to much extent by the middle-aged and older members of the clerical profession or by the churches generally. Quite recently I propounded the question to a young pastor of more than average intelligence, and his prompt reply was, that he believed that "great progress had been made in theology within the last ten years." Henry, the commentator, says of young ministers, "God takes care of the green ears of corn, and so should we." I suppose that all ripe ears of corn were "green" before they were ripe; and though the remark of my young friend may seem somewhat verdant, he will doubtless, with good "care," become a distinguished man. His remark was typical of the times. I deem it, therefore, safe to assume that that impression is quite current among us; and as Bacon long ago remarked that "the principles of the young men of a nation decide its destiny," so this opinion of some of our young theologians may lead to results which will seriously affect the best interests of the churches. While we all heartily adjure that spirit of heresy-hunting which seeks to promote groundless divisions, or which would subserve mere partisan interests, I hold it to be the duty of every friend of Christianity to "contend earnestly," and yet in the spirit of the Gospel, "for the faith which," as the New Revision has it, "was once for all delivered unto the saints"—a "faith" which was as perfect when it was "delivered" as it is now, and which will admit of no improvement under the highest culture which humanity will ever attain. Besides, in these days of theological uncertainty we are all called upon to *define our positions*, and this paper will at least define my own.

There are four distinct grounds on which the opinion now under consideration is based, and to which it may be well briefly to advert, before we enter upon the examination of the subject itself.

1. The great frequency with which the remark of John Robinson is quoted from his Valedictory Address to the Pilgrims at Delft Haven, that he was confident "*God had more light in His Word which He would cause to break forth*," indicates that it has had no little influence in diffusing the impression to which I refer. This remark of Robinson had, however, probably exclusive reference to points of church order and liberty of conscience — questions which at that time were warmly discussed — and not to the truths of dogmatic theology. It was not difference of opinion upon those truths which separated the Pilgrims from the Church of England, or sent them to Leyden or brought them to Plymouth. Robinson, Brewster, Goodwin and their compeers among the Independents held as firmly to the doctrines of the Reformed Confessions and to the Thirty-nine Articles as their persecutors did. They fled to Holland to enjoy the rights of conscience which the prelates of the Established Church denied them at home. Robinson's celebrated remark had, therefore, probably no reference at all to the subject now before us, and is no indorsement of the theory that we are making "progress in theology."

2. The progress which has been made in past ages in *the construction of creeds* has also had its influence. It is a poor compliment to the intelligence of this age that a word need be said in defense of Creeds or Confessions of Faith. They are demanded by the necessities of the human mind. They are demanded as a bulwark against error, as the basis and limit of Christian fellowship, and for the propagation of the true faith. People of little intellectual culture need such digests to compass the meaning of so large a book as the Bible, and nothing is more acceptable to those of the greatest discipline of mind than compression of thought. To discredit them by satire or by flippantly calling them obsolete and useless is shallow, and indicative either of prejudice or ignorance, or both. The editor of one of our so-called orthodox religious newspapers recently treated his readers with the following language:

> The sermons our grandfathers thought so eloquent and edifying would empty any of our modern churches; and not so much because their essential doctrines are objectionable, as that their statements of doctrine would offend modern ideas and culture. Every age has its own fashion of thought and speech; its own way of setting forth the everlasting Gospel, and its own beliefs; and it will not do, while our fashions are changing, to dress our faith in antique toggery, which really makes it appear objectionable, if not ridiculous; nor above all things to mistake the clothes of religion for the indestructible body of Christ.

To say nothing of the taste displayed in this extract, the latitudinarianism it defends is most dangerous, and its logic tempts criticism. Sydney Smith said he could "drive a coach-and-four through any Act of Parliament," but an establishment twice as large could be driven through this reasoning. Thinking men must have creeds. They are imperatively demanded by many reasons and for many purposes, and for no purpose more than to prevent the very laxness in theology which is here encouraged. They have been used from the earliest Christian times, and will doubtless continue to be to the end of the world.

From this apologetic defense of Confessions of Faith I proceed to say, that though Augustine held many of the doctrines which we hold, they have since his day been digested into more systematic and scientific forms. The Nicene Creed, as compared with the Apostles' Creed, shows great advance in the formal statement of Christian doctrine. The Augsburg Confession, drawn up by Luther and Melancthon in 1530, was another step of progress, particularly in relation to the real substitution and vicarious sacrifice of Christ, and the necessity, freeness, and efficacy of divine grace. The Synod of Dort, in 1619, defined with greater accuracy the important difference between the doctrines of Calvinism and Arminianism; the Waldensian, Bohemian, Helvetic, Augustinian and Tetrapolitan Confessions, and several others amounting to some forty in number, all made important contributions to theological correctness, and, finally, the Westminster Assembly in 1643 formed a Confession of Faith and two Catechisms, which for comprehensiveness, symmetry, and soundness had never been equaled, and which have scarcely been improved in the slightest particular down to the present time. The Cambridge Platform in 1648, the Savoy Confession in 1658, the Boston Confession in 1680, and the Saybrook Platform in 1708 are, with a few quite unimportant exceptions, mere re-affirmations, and in almost *ipsissimis verbis* of the doctrines of the Westminster Confession. Edwards and Bellamy, Hopkins and Dwight, Alexander and Hodge, Griffin and Woods, Neander and Olshausen have scarcely made any perceptible progress beyond the wonderful general accuracy of the Westminster Confession; and today there is no creed in Old England or New England, or anywhere else, which is so well known, or regarded as such high authority, or is so generally appealed to as the standard of truth, as this Confession framed two centuries and a half ago. During this long period, famous for the construction of creeds, there was no growth in the body of truth, but only growth in the statement of it. With the Westminster, all creed-making ceased because the subject was exhausted. That close

approximation to absolute perfectness satisfied intelligent Christians on both sides of the Atlantic, and it holds out but little encouragement for much, if any, further "progress" in doctrinal soundness.

3. The astonishing progress which has been made within the last fifty years in many of *the natural sciences and the arts* has doubtless led some to believe that a corresponding progress must have been made in theology. The brilliant discoveries in geology, astronomy, and chemistry — the rapidity of travel by land and sea by means of steam — and the new sciences of telegraphy and telephony, which bring America, Europe, Asia, and Africa within speaking distance of each other, have apparently convinced the "Young America" of our clergy that corresponding progress has been made, and will yet be made, in theology. But considering the wide difference there is in the nature of the two subjects which are thus brought into comparison and of our information upon them, there is an unfortunate chasm between the premises and the conclusion.

4. Another cause of the supposed advance in theology may be found in *a secret disrelish of the doctrines of the Bible themselves, and a desire to get rid of them altogether.* Faithfulness requires us to admit, under the instructions which history forces upon our remembrance, that some of the subtlest developments of dissatisfaction with the truth have been found under the robes of the clerical office, and that that incipient hesitation to declare "all the counsel of God," which next precedes the avowal of positive error, is the fault of consecrated lips. Error has always entered the church through the pulpit, not through the pew; and what watchword is more flattering to the pride of the heart, or less likely to awaken the suspicions of good men, than the cry of "progress in theology," and especially so in a day when "progress" is confessedly made in almost every other important interest of society? It will not be known till the all-unfolding day, how many new devices are born of hatred of the truth.

Having indicated what I suppose to be some of the causes of the opinion I am considering, let us now inquire in what respects it is true that we are making progress, not in theology, but in those auxiliary sciences which help us to ascertain the theology of the Scriptures, and which some mistake for theology itself. These have of late been greatly improved, but theology proper can hardly admit of improvement.

For instance, improvement has been made in the science of *exegesis.* It was a sound maxim of Melancthon, "*Scriptura non potest intelligi theologice, nisi antea sit intellecta grammatice*" — "The Scripture cannot be understood theologically until it has been understood philo-

logically." The lexical and grammatical peculiarities of the Bible — the one relating to the origin, form, and usage of words, and the other to their flexion and government — are now mastered; the nice shades of difference in the meaning of biblical synonyms, and the true interpretation of difficult texts and of Hebrew and Greek idioms, were never so thoroughly understood; the true canons of interpretation have been settled; and a determined adherence to them, let them conduct us to whatever results they may, is now conceded to be the religious duty of every expounder of the Scriptures.

It is a fact of the deepest interest to the cause of truth, that all this increase of light within the last half century, upon the science of biblical interpretation, has not unfavorably affected a single doctrine of the orthodox faith, but, on the contrary, it has contributed to establish that system on a basis which will forever remain impregnable. Fairbairn, in his *Hermeneutical Manual*, says: [1] "By the establishment of a more accurate criticism, by sounder principles of interpretation, and by an intimate acquaintance with the original languages, it has been found that Scripture will not surrender up any of its peculiar doctrines." Winer also affirms the same truth: [2] "The controversies among interpreters have usually led to the admission that the old Protestant views of the meaning of the sacred texts are the true ones." Progress, then, in hermeneutical science has only confirmed the theological system of the great divines of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Very decided advance has also been made in *the history of religious opinions*, and we now know its true place and real value in the interpretation of the Scriptures. The famous maxim of Vincent, of Lerens, "*Quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*" — "It must have been believed *everywhere, always, and by all*" — was a preposterous engine of oppression, employed by Rome to compel conformity to the doctrines and usages of that church. That celebrated adage of Roman Catholic theologians, which once spread alarm among the nations, is even now feebly but impotently echoed by their High Church followers, but another generation will hardly pass away before its dying tones will be lost on the ear of man. Discrimination is now familiarly made between that ecclesiastical authority which steps in between God and the conscience, and claims to determine the faith of men by the decrees of councils and the edicts of popes under the pains and penalties of perdition, and that enlightened and sober regard to the belief of good men in past times, which uses it to

[1] P. 88. [2] *Literatur Zeitung*, No. 44.

accredit and confirm our own. If the Church of Rome has fallen into the one extreme of making itself the only and the infallible test of truth, the Puritans, in their hatred of prelatic authority, fell into the other, by throwing away the argument altogether. A very important advance has, therefore, been made in theological science, by acquiring a thorough knowledge of *the history of religious opinions, and by a juster application of that knowledge in determining our own faith.* The wise theologian, while he will never surrender the right of private judgment, will listen reverently to the voices of all time — to the accordant chorus of the great and the good of all the ages; and when he sees the Church passing through her cycles of controversy, and persecution, and progressive enlightenment, with a gradual and steady approach towards unity of faith; and her efforts to reach the absolute verities of the Bible; and, at last, her doctrinal views harmonizing, coalescing, and culminating in the Reformed Confessions, and best set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith — he feels that there is little risk in embracing a system which has been eliminated from the Scriptures by such a process — by sixteen centuries of laborious study, unsparing self-correction, and earnest prayer. A system, so educed from the Bible and so enucleated of error, must be the true one, or all human methods of arriving at the truth are at fault. The clenching of this argument is the fact that the present thorough knowledge of ecclesiastical history — a department of study in which the Westminster divines were not so thoroughly versed — has not impaired the conclusions at which they arrived on exegetical grounds, but strongly corroborates them. If there be, then, any system of religious doctrine which is certified to be the true one, by the general current of opinion for eighteen centuries, that system is the Evangelical in the Westminster sense. In this matter, "the voice of the people is the voice of God." "The true history of Christianity is the history of true Christianity."

Theological philosophy, too, has been improved. The influence which our philosophy exerts on our theological speculations is proverbial. The dogmatic views of the early fathers were essentially affected by the philosophy of Plato; those of the mediæval schoolmen by the dialectics of Aristotle; and those of our own times by the systems of Des Cartes, Bacon, Locke, Berkeley, Kant, Hegel, Thomas Reid and Sir William Hamilton. It is hardly possible for the scientific theologian wholly to emancipate himself from the philosophy and public opinion of the age in which he lives; and if he can, he must necessarily have some philosophy of his own, which is always less valuable, as it is more subjective, more partial, more out of the line

of history, and less adapted to the wants of the age. "The history of philosophy and Christian doctrine," says Dr. Schaff, "move forward side by side, alternately attracting and repelling each other, till at last the natural reason of man will come into perfect harmony with Divine revelation, and the wisdom of the world become identical with the wisdom of God."

The progress which has of late been made in the philosophy of theology has, I think, demonstrated the shallowness of that theory of sin which makes it consist wholly in "exercises," to the rejection of a sinful nature;[1] and which holds that, under a government of law, it can be pardoned and disposed of without an atonement which shall uphold the government of a righteous God. Superficial views of actual sin, and of the "lower deep" of original sin, logically lead to superficial views of regeneration, and resolve it into culture, or into that self-determination of the will which we are told a sinner can at any moment enact, as easily as he can turn over his hand or walk into another room. That is "self-determination of the will" with a vengeance. That theory is most pernicious, inasmuch as it practically, though not professedly, excludes the Divine agency and the Divine sovereignty from the work of selecting the heirs of grace and of renewing their hearts. If this theory be true, for aught I can see, men are "born again," not "of God," but "of the will of the flesh," and "of the will of man." Happily for the cause of truth, such absurd theories are passing away, and sounder views of the nature of sin and of regeneration, under the influence of a sounder philosophy, are beginning to obtain among divines who thought differently forty or fifty years ago. A theology which is sufficient to save this apostate world must rest on the soundest philosophical basis, and we must go back for our theology to that great system of doctrine which culminated in the rise of Puritanism, the settlement of this country, modern revivals of religion, and missionary operations in pagan lands.

---

[1] The theory which was broached fifty years ago with distinguished ability, that our "nature" is well enough, and that only somehow or other we are sinners "*by* nature;" or, at most, that we naturally have "proclivities," "biases," or "tendencies" to sin, which are wrong, but not sinful, opened the floodgates of speculation, which has done immense injury to the churches, especially the Congregational churches. John Ruskin says: "It takes just seven years to get an idea through the head of the British public," but it did not take so long to get the idea "through the head" of the American public that that theory is false. For thirty years it has hardly been quoted; but for those who disbelieve the Scripture doctrine of "original sin," it is a theory which is "convenient to have in the house," but it has long been kept in the attic.

So much for the progress which has been made in the sciences which are subsidiary to theology; let us now look at *theology itself*, where no substantial advance has been made, or can be made, and which is the vital point in the question now before us. In the nature of the case, the great doctrines of Christianity themselves — the substantive, central truths of the Bible — must always remain the same. They can no more change or be improved than their Author and Revealer can change or be improved. They are a transcript of Himself. They are the same now that they were a thousand years ago, or will be a thousand years to come. They are "the same yesterday, and today, and forever." Doctrinal truth, as it came from the mind of the Holy Ghost, is a fixed quantity. Its integrity is impaired either by addition or subtraction. Canon Liddon, in his Bampton Lectures, says: "There is no real increase in the body of truth committed to the Church. She has possessed it in its completeness from the first." But though this perhaps is generally admitted, it is said that our apprehension and statement of biblical truth may be indefinitely improved. Here then is the gist of our inquiry, and here is the point where the greatest "progress" is claimed to be made. It has lately been declared that, "in our apprehension of divine truth great progress may be made, and is devoutly hoped for. If progress has been made in the centuries past, why may it not be in the centuries to come? And who will say where this progress is to cease?"

Now, in reply to all this let me say, that any increasing apprehension of the truth can involve no addition to, or subtraction from, the one unchanging body of truth. But the cry which was first heard some fifty years ago, that we have made, and are still making, "progress in theology," means much more than this. It means that we have outgrown some of the doctrines which our fathers believed, and have found some new ones which they did not believe; or, in other words, that we have made important additions to, or subtractions from, the body of truth as it has been held for centuries by Evangelical Christians. Just here lies the great mistake of the age. There are two forms in which such "progress," if really made, would naturally show itself:

1. In the construction of a *better Confession of Faith;* or,
2. In the *better preaching of the truth in the pulpit*, or in both.

Let us now institute a somewhat thorough examination of both these points, and see whether such improvement has really been made.

1. Have the "advanced thinkers" of the day, as they are some-

times pleased to call themselves, made a better *Confession of Faith* than that which, for nearly two hundred and fifty years, has been the basis of the Congregational churches of this country? That basis is the Westminster Confession. There has been time enough, within the last half-century, to construct such a Confession. Has it been done?

To make a new Confession for a large denomination would involve more difficulties than perhaps might at first be apprehended. It would involve,

(*a*) The necessity of *reconstructing our theological nomenclature* — perhaps of making new definitions of old terms, or of coining new terms to express the new thoughts.

(*b*) The difficulty, not to say impossibility, of making a Confession of Faith which will *suit ourselves*, or the great Congregational Body; and,

(*c*) If a new Confession should be generally adopted, it will *sever our union* with the great Presbyterian Church in this country, in England, and in Scotland, and the Congregational churches in Great Britain — with all of which we are now on terms of the closest fellowship — as they would regard us as having left their communion and become heretical.

Any statement of theological doctrines which abandons or modifies the usual terminology, would be a virtual abandonment or modification of the doctrines themselves. Probably of no science, excepting mathematics, is it as true that "words" are "things" as that of theology. The current terms which set forth the dogmatic truths of revelation have been used for ages. Their etymological and historical sense is so true to the thoughts to be expressed — they have been employed so long by the most acute minds to mean precisely what they do in common discourse — and they are so clearly and firmly fixed in the public thought, that any attempt to substitute others in their place would at once, and justly, excite suspicion of unsoundness in the faith. Some of our Presbyterian friends in the Western States, to prevent the spread of our polity there, have affirmed that Congregationalists are not sound in the faith; but if we should adopt a new Confession, they would have the very best reason for saying so. New terms and new definitions, as well as a new creed, would generally be regarded as new departures from the truth. Hence it is that some popular preachers of the "progressive" school, who are experimenting in this direction, have already lost much of the confidence of the Christian public. Indeed, it is hardly conceivable that society can ever reach such a height of refinement, or the ministry become

so learned and astute, that these terms can be safely dispensed with, or even essentially modified.

We have a Formula of Faith which has stood the test of the severest criticism, both friendly and hostile, for nearly two centuries and a half. It has been accepted by large numbers of the most intelligent Christians on the face of the earth, and it is still held with unwavering fidelity; and to suppose that it can be improved in any important particulars would seem to be against all probability or possibility. Besides, in the present feverish, excited state of the public mind on this subject, it would be but little short of a miracle, if anybody can frame a Confession of Faith which would be as acceptable to Congregationalists themselves as the Westminster Confession is. Confessions, like "Constitutions," are not "made," but "grow." They are produced in some peculiar crises in the church, and *by* those crises, and by those only. There must be some great, overmastering necessity for their creation, or they will prove abortive; and I do not see, in the present state of our churches, any approach to such an all-controlling necessity.

But when we are asked to accept the Westminster Symbol as a finality in creed-making, good and sufficient reasons ought to be given for such a conclusion. That I think can be done. Those reasons, in part, have already been intimated — more will now be stated; and I wish to hold your minds to a true historical perspective.

It was a hundred years from John Calvin to the Westminster Assembly, and a hundred years from the Westminster Assembly to Jonathan Edwards. Those two centuries were a most remarkable period. It was the time of the resurrection of the human mind from the sleep of a thousand years. It was the age of the Reformation. It was the age of the *Renaissance* of theology. It was the age of the construction of creeds. It was the theological era of the world. Calvin had great constructive ability, and in 1535, and before he was twenty-five years old, he published the first edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Such was its sudden and extreme popularity, that eight editions were called for within twenty-four years. It was the grandest synthesis of Christian doctrine which had appeared since the world began; and Guizot says: "For more than three centuries it has embodied the faith and regulated the lives of many millions of Christians in France, Switzerland, Holland, Scotland, England, and America." But, like everything human, it had its imperfections. Calvin held peculiar views of the fourth commandment. He held, too, that every word of the Bible

is inspired, and that the Divine predestination of "whatsoever comes to pass" is so absolute, that the human will is not free. These and several other points were actively and warmly discussed a whole century, and such was the unrest of the public mind on themes so momentous, that the British Parliament organized, empowered and required the Westminster Assembly of Divines to form a Confession of Faith and two Catechisms — one for adults and the other for children — which should be a correct exhibit of all the leading doctrines of the Holy Scriptures.

The Assembly were one hundred and fifty-one in number, but about sixty executed the work. It was composed of lords and commoners, English Puritans and Scotch Covenanters, Erastians and Episcopalians, Presbyterians and Independents, or Congregationalists. Among the laymen, besides several of the nobility, were John Selden, usually called the "learned Selden," Edmund Prideaux, Sir Henry Vane, John Pym, and John Evelyn; and among the divines were William Twisse, Thomas Goodwin, William Gouge, Samuel Ward, John Lightfoot, William Bridge, Edmund Calamy, and John Arrowsmith of England, and Alexander Henderson, George Gillespie, and Samuel Rutherford of Scotland. They enjoyed also the assistance of the most eminent scholars in the kingdom, lay and clerical, who were not of their own number. They lived indeed in troublous times; but the agitating questions of that day were mainly the extent of the royal prerogatives, and the connection between the Church and the State, and not the central truths of Christianity. Richard Baxter says: "Never since the time of the apostles were there a synod of more excellent men." Several of them had also just risen from a revision of the Thirty-nine Articles, and thus their minds were disciplined for the work before them.[1]

Their discussions show a remarkable breadth of thought, calmness of view, and the nicest discriminations; and prove that they were men of the highest intellectual qualifications. Such men and their work cannot but command the highest respect of the scholarship of the present day, which can make the slightest pretensions to candor. But their crowning excellence was that they were men of prayer, eminent for "walking with God" even in a generation which perhaps has had no equal for consecration to Christ. With these ample preparations, they endeavored to make a comprehensive epitome of the doctrines of the Holy Scriptures, to eliminate the last particle of error from

[1] There was then indeed no Episcopal Church in England — it having been abolished by Act of Parliament.

their work, and to state the truth with such clearness, fairness, fullness, and roundabout common sense, "looking before and after," that it could not possibly be misapprehended; and they succeeded to the general satisfaction of Christendom down to the present day. Many of the earlier creeds reflect the opinions and the controversies of the times in which they were written, but the Westminster Confession is remarkably, if not entirely, free from everything that is local and temporary, and seems to have been constructed for all times and all peoples. Its style has just enough of a dash of antiquity to command respect. The special harmonizing influence of the Holy Spirit must be devoutly and gratefully acknowledged, in bringing men of such incongruous political and ecclesiastical views into accord upon the dogmatic truths of Revelation.

The Assembly took time to do their work thoroughly. In forming their Confession of Faith and two Catechisms, they held no less than *one thousand one hundred and sixty-three sessions.* The recent Revision of the New Testament — a very elaborate work of ten years' duration — was executed by a company of English scholars of about twenty-five in number, and about the same number of American scholars. Both companies met monthly, and they had, of course, one hundred and twenty sessions each — making two hundred and forty meetings of both bodies taken together. But the Assembly of Divines at Westminster held nearly *five times* as many meetings to execute their work. The truth is, this age is too busy for creed-making. We have too much other work to do. Besides, this age is too materialistic to be theological, too rapid to be profound, too party-spirited to be honest. The age of creed-making has clearly passed away — probably never to return.

In the prosecution of their work, the Assembly adopted the "Analogy of Faith" as their ultimate rule of interpretation. "Analogy of Faith" means that the Scripture must be *interpreted by itself;* that is, as the Old Scottish Confession well says: "In order to gain the right sense of a passage, we must see what the Holy Spirit uniformly says *in the body of the Sacred Scriptures.*" This the Assembly endeavored to do with all faithfulness. The Westminster Confession was therefore formed by a conjuncture of conditions far more favorable than any which preceded it or may come after it. It is the crystallization of the most mature thought of all the ages which had passed away.

It is a singular fact, and one which should increase our humility, that antiquity did some things which we cannot do. The Phœnicians made our alphabet — we shall never make one. The mighty mechan-

ical powers which reared the Pyramids are among the "lost arts." Greece was the home of the arts long before America was discovered; and the best we can do are but humble and almost absurd imitations of her sculpture and architecture. Our laws came from Rome, and all modern jurisprudence is founded upon them. The world may well despair of seeing another man, however wide-awake, who shall point out the way to heaven better than the immortal dreamer in Bedford jail. Handel's "Messiah" leaves all modern musical compositions far in the rear; and our fathers at Cambridge and Saybrook, and quite recently our fathers and brethren at Plymouth, acknowledged their inability to make a better Confession of Faith than the Westminster.

We now come to the exegetical question — how are we to understand the Westminster Symbol? It has been differently interpreted — how can we ascertain the true interpretation? All the great creeds of antiquity have an historical meaning. The Nicene Creed has an historical meaning. The Athanasian Creed has an historical meaning. The Decrees of the Council of Trent have an historical meaning. John Wesley left no creed for his followers, but his theological views were well known, and they have an historical meaning. Calvin's *Institutes* have an historical meaning; and, in like manner, the Westminster Confession has an historical meaning, and that meaning is the true one. In accepting, then, or signing the Westminster Symbol, we are to do it in its wholeness or entirety. Thousands have so done it, and thousands will do it so again. We are not, then, to do it with any of the modern subterfuges, or with any "qualifications," or with "mental reservations," or for "substance of doctrine," or as "we understand it," unless we understand it in its true, historical sense; or in the sense in which that immortal manifesto was understood by its framers. Such "qualifications" vitiate and make void the whole proceeding, and reduce it to a farce. General Jackson said, "I take the Constitution of the United States as *I* understand it." He had no right to do so. The Supreme Court of the United States are the constituted expounders of that instrument, and General Jackson was bound by their interpretation. In like manner, the Bible is to be interpreted by the supreme court of public opinion, and every man is bound by that decision. There can be no appeal from that decision to any man's personal judgment, be he peasant or be he President. The Westminster Symbol, then, as interpreted by the common judgment of the world, is a true epitome of the doctrinal contents of the Holy

Scriptures, and thus we have reached the answer of the question, What is theological truth?[1]

But to be more specific. The Westminster system is moderate Calvinism. As it was left to the Assembly to correct the extreme views of Calvin, so it was left to Jonathan Edwards to prove more clearly that the atonement is unlimited; to make a more thorough discrimination between natural and moral ability and inability; to make a deeper analysis of the nature of virtue; and to show more conclusively that the human will is free under the controlling government of God. His mind was an union of opposite qualities. It had much of the comprehensiveness of Bacon, with much of the subtlety of Aquinas. His reasoning is conclusive, for his logic is inexorable. His treatment of error is merciless; like a sleuth-hound after his prey, he,

> "Steady to his purpose,
> Pursues it close through every lane of life,
> Nor misses once its track, but presses on,"

till at last he overtakes and scatters it to the four winds. Like the Bible, he exalts the Divine justice as illustrated in the crucifixion of Christ and the punishment of the wicked, and at the same time his whole theological system is irradiated with the ecstasy caught from heaven at the time of his conversion, and reflected through his life in his sweet and transcendent Christian experience. This blending of justice and mercy will ever make him a living power in theology, and a fine illustration of the everlasting relations of God to men.

Edwards corroborates the Assembly. You will not find that the Assembly or Edwards held to a Divine efficiency which makes God the author of sin, or to a human efficiency which makes man the author of holiness; or to an imputation of Adam's sin to all his posterity without their participation in it; or that all sin consists in sinning; or that sin is the necessary means of the greatest good; or that the atonement is merely a spectacle, designed to make a moral impression on the universe. All *these* theories are modern and ethical; *their* theories are biblical and spiritual. *These* theories end in speculation and controversy; *their* theories make men feel that they are guilty, lead them to Christ as their only Saviour, and fill them with unspeakable joy as they look forward to the Eternal Future. The Westminster Confession is now held by the most intelligent Chris-

[1] "As the theologian passes the several ages of the church in review, and becomes acquainted with the results to which the general mind of the church has come in interpreting the Scriptures, he runs little hazard in regard to their meaning and contents." — Professor Shedd's *Discourses and Essays*, p. 151.

tians here and in Europe to be the purest and the best system of theology. Yes, and it holds together today, in one solid phalanx, a much larger number of Evangelical Protestants than any other in Christendom. It is unquestionably imperfect, as it was made by fallible men, but it approaches nearer to absolute perfectness than any other human wisdom has constructed; and it should be firmly held by us, and, next to the Bible, should be our *vade mecum* to the end of life. It is the right rule, but the Scriptures only are the rule of right.

The Methodists have no generally accepted Confession of Faith. The Baptists have what is called the New Hampshire Confession, but it is very short, like an ordinary church creed. The Episcopalians are content with the Thirty-nine Articles. The Reformed (Dutch) Church have the Confession of the Synod of Dort and the Heidelberg Catechism. The Congregational and Presbyterian denominations in this country, in England and in Scotland are founded squarely on the Westminster Formulary. These two denominations must then be regarded as the two greatest theological denominations in the Protestant world — an honor alike creditable to their intellects and their hearts.[1]

Now, shall we forsake this "glorious company" by the introduction of novelties or the mitigation of creeds? Shall we abandon this "goodly fellowship," and go out we know not where? Shall we forfeit their confidence by making ourselves into a new and heterodox denomination? Shall we abandon a system of faith which has been wrought out by the most profound scholars, the most level-headed thinkers, the subtlest metaphysicians, and prayed over by the devoutest Christian men? Shall we give up a system, or any part of a system, or add anything to a system, which bears the imprint of the solar effulgence of the three greatest lights of the Church, AUGUSTINE, CALVIN, EDWARDS, the Bishop of Hippo, the Bishop of Geneva, and the Bishop of Northampton? May God forbid.

---

[1] Mr. Spurgeon recently said a good word for the Westminster Shorter Catechism and the Scotch in the same breath. He told the Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland: "We have a catechetical seminary connected with our church, in which we teach a little book known as the Shorter Catechism with proofs. I should like to see some one write a better summary of Christian doctrines. Unless some one gives us a better book we will stick to it. A minister, in preaching, could not find a better means of stating doctrines than in the words of the Shorter Catechism. When I am sitting in my chair, with a hundred young men around me, and I ask any question, I frequently say: 'Now, none of you Scotchmen answer; I know that you know the answer; let the Englishmen answer.' Scotchmen have a wider and more thorough knowledge of the Scriptures than the mass of my own countrymen, and I believe it is due to the practice of family worship and to the use of the Assembly's Catechism."

The Westminster Confession was made by Episcopalians, Scotch Covenanters, Presbyterians and Congregationalists; and now, after two and a half centuries of study and prayer and with all the scholarship of the world to help them, what new doctrines have they accepted and wish to introduce into a new Confession of Faith? Or, what doctrines in the Westminster have become obsolete or unsound, and they desire to have them excluded from their Confession? Are there half a dozen which they wish to have admitted or rejected? If so, what are they? Are there two? and if so, what are they? Is there one? and if so, what is it?

Now, *per contra*, so recently as in 1865, the Congregational denomination, by their representatives in solemn conclave assembled on Burial Hill in Plymouth, and appealing to the Searcher of hearts and to the shades of the fathers to attest their sincerity, avouched their cordial belief in, and their continued acceptance of, the Westminster Confession; and now, in less than twenty years, we have made such "progress in theology," or rather have so far departed from the Faith agreed to at Westminster and sworn to at Plymouth, that we are trying to get up a new Confession and a new Catechism! "Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph." It now seems nearly certain that the keen-sighted instinct of the English-speaking world will reject the recent Revision of the New Testament unless it is itself revised; and as it is, in some important respects, easier to make such a Revision than an acceptable Confession of Faith, it is probable that that instinct will make a similar disposition of the new Confession and the new Catechism.

2. But secondly and finally, though our new-light friends have no creed to show which is better and more widely approved than the Westminster, we are told that, at any rate, great improvement is visible in *the preaching of the truth in the pulpit.* It is also alleged that the great increase of benevolence in the churches within the last few years proves it to be so.

It seems quite ungracious to spoil such a self-complacent theory; but let us see what are the facts in the case.

As to the matter of benevolence, the statistics show that there has been for many years no such increase as is commonly supposed.[1] That the literary and æsthetic traits of the pulpit are superior to those of any former period is most gratefully admitted. The educational equipment of the young clergy of the present day is without any parallel, and the world has a right to expect corresponding success. But

[1] See Note at the close.

does such success appear? Is it not the public conviction, after making all allowance for the success of individuals, that, as a general fact, all that has been gained on the score of elegance and taste is more than balanced by the loss of spirituality, of depth and of truth? Is it not the general belief, that the distinctive doctrines of Christianity do not lie in the minds of many of the clergy so clearly and sharply defined, and that their discussion of them in the pulpit is by no means so frequent and uncompromising, as in past times? Is it not a matter of remark and solicitude in the churches, that the ministry of the present day do not preach so doctrinally as the fathers did? Is is not true, that the great doctrines of the existence of God, the Trinity, the incarnation of the Second Person, the native depravity of man, the atonement for sin by the sacrifice of Christ, personal election, regeneration by the special influence of the Holy Spirit, justification by faith alone, and the endless punishment of the wicked, are not formally discussed in many of our pulpits once in a year, or even once in a lifetime? Is it not the fact, that revivals of religion are less frequent and less powerful, that conviction of sin is less profound, and that the experience of professed converts is less satisfactory? Does anybody doubt, is it possible to doubt, that the substantive truths of the gospel are *not* as thoroughly preached and urged home upon the consciences of men as faithfully as they were by our fathers?

Instead of this thorough preaching of the essential truths of Christianity, some of our pulpits are now avoiding the more repulsive texts of the Bible, and are largely occupied with tasteful essays on very subordinate topics. Some are busied with speculations about a speedy "second advent" and "conditional immortality." Others are holding, with Dorner, that there will be a probation in Hades, after death and before the judgment, for "infants, idiots, antediluvians, some heathen, and children born apparently to no moral chance."[1] Some

[1] It is barely possible that such men as Socrates and Seneca were Christians. Some knowledge of the true God and of Christ — emanating from the families of Noah and Abraham, and from the Jews by their sacred writings and their several captivities — must have been very widely diffused among the nations of antiquity. Baxter says, "I am not much inclined to pass a peremptory sentence of damnation upon all who never heard of Christ, having some more reasons than I knew of before to think that God's dealings with such is much unbeknown to us." Dante, too, assigns to Ripheus, the Trojan, who died before Christ, and to Trajan, the Roman emperor, who died after Christ, places in Paradise, because he believed that they were Christians:

> "They quitted not their bodies, as thou deem'st,
> Gentiles, but Christians; in firm rooted faith,
> This, of the feet in future to be pierced,
> That, of feet nailed already to the Cross." *Paradiso*, XX, 95-98.

believe that there will be no general judgment "at the end of the world," but that we are judged here and now as we pass along in life. Others are spending quite a disproportion of their time in demolishing the philosophers for their theory, that man was not created but developed from monkeys or protoplasm — a theory which is already discredited by the best scientific authorities. One is studying the paradox, how much "liberty" he can enjoy "within creeds;" another is ringing the changes on "inferential theology" and "outgrown theology;" a third, while professing great respect for creeds, is flaunting the assumption that we have got beyond creeds, and that they are all rationalistic; a fourth is urging us to extend our fellowship to all denominations which profess to love Christ, though they reject most of the important doctrines of the Scriptures; and a fifth is vain enough to think that he is particularly smart if he has some crotchets in his head; but, in these days when crotchets are so popular, a man is particularly smart if he is smart enough to keep all crotchets out of his head. Professor Park has been a teacher of theology thirty-four years; but such is his deep conviction of the decay of the pulpit, that he said, in his recent address in Pilgrim Hall, "Our Unitarian friends at the beginning of this century preached more Orthodoxy than is preached in some Orthodox pulpits at the present day." Socinian theories of the atonement, Universalist theories of future punishment, and infidel theories of inspiration are not unfrequently heard in pulpits which claim to be Orthodox. Over the pulpits of some clergymen the mechanic's sign might well be placed, "All kinds of twisting and turning done here." In short, the efforts of some preachers would seem to be, by experimenting on the public patience, to ascertain how far they can be lax and heterodox with safety.

There is also a spice of absurdity running through some of these modern theories. Even so great and good a man as Bishop Berkeley could not stand against the dictates of common sense:

> "When Bishop Berkeley said there is no 'matter,'
> And proved it — 'twas no matter what he said."

It is very unfortunate when a church and parish have a pastor who is excessively fond of *speculation*. They are frequently asking the most momentous question which ever falls from human lips, "What must I do to be saved?" but he has some curious question to discuss before the next minister's meeting. They need him to help them in their sorrows and temptations, but he is perambulating the boundary between truth and error, and often with one foot a little over the line, and is in no mood to give them spiritual help and con-

solation. They would be glad to have him come in and instruct their children in the definite truths of the catechism; but no, he is pursuing some *ignis fatuus* on the cold marshes of semi-infidelity, and is not certain whether it be a conjecture or a theory, or a truth. He is quite dissatisfied with our Confession of Faith, and wants a new one which will recognize his pet notions. He has formed, in some respects, a new gospel — he may preach it or he may profess to keep it to himself — but Paul tells him, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we preached unto you, let him be accursed." Besides, no minister who holds any peculiar views can keep them to himself. If it is known that he holds them, *he preaches them.*

"From such apostles, O ye mitred heads, preserve the church."

The spirit of excessive speculation which crept into the ministry and churches fifty years ago, though recently lauded in some high places, has thrown Congregationalism into its present water-logged, helpless condition in the trough of the sea. It has reduced our relative importance among the denominations. It was the primal movement for a new Confession. It made the trouble at Andover, and will perhaps make more; indeed, there seems to be no way to quiet the public apprehensions but to obtain the opinion of the Supreme Judicial Court upon the question, Is the "new theology" which is now avowed to be current in that Theological Seminary, the theology of either the Original or the Associate Founders, and which they took such extreme care to perpetuate forever? Excessive speculation seeks to substitute a "new theology" — in some most vital aspects in relation to sin and the ability of the sinner — in the place of the theology of Westminster, of Edwards, of the fathers of New England, and of their theological lineal descendants of the present day, both in this country and in Europe. It prevents revivals of religion. It cools the spirit of benevolence. It separates brethren. It promotes controversy. It benumbs the public and the personal conscience. It makes us comparatively satisfied with our lethargy, and unwilling to know and admit our "leanness;" and until this spirit of speculation is discountenanced, and repented of and abandoned, and both ministers and churches return to their ancestral faith and appropriate duties, it may be only a question of time how long their Great Head and Master will have any use for their services.

Again, a good deal of the preaching of the present day is, I think, ineffective, because it is one-sided and ill-balanced. Undue prominence is given to some favorite feature of theology, and others, of equal importance, are rarely considered. But in all true preaching, as in the Bible, it is difficult to tell which outshines the other, "the justice or the grace."

Christianity, too, has a place for both the conservative and the progressive forces of the human heart — the *conservative*, for holding fast the great, unimprovable truths of Revelation, and the *progressive*, for applying those truths in every possible form and manner to the salvation of men; the *conservative*, to maintain intact the grand foundation doctrines of the Scriptures, and the *progressive*, to hasten the flight of "the angel having the everlasting Gospel to preach" to all the dwellers on the earth. Here then is work enough for both these classes — work enough for all tastes and all ages — and there is no collision among them. A perfect Christian character would involve an harmonious interaction of these coördinate forces, and Jonathan Edwards was perhaps the best specimen of the union of these two powers which the church has had since the apostle Paul. The Rev. Joseph Cook says, "Would that we had a thousand evangelists of the Edwardean type."

But we are often told that "we must preach Christ," "we must preach Christ." Yes, we must "preach Christ." But there is much said about it nowadays that is mere cant. It is often recommended as if it were a salvo for neglecting other doctrines of the Bible, or even as an excuse for preaching a little error. But Christ is not preached if his doctrines are not preached. He is not preached if error is preached. It is also recommended as if it were a new thing under the sun to "preach Christ." But it is doubtful whether "Christ and his cross" are preached as well today as they were by Edwards and McCheyne, Watts and Cowper, and a host of other men. Cotton Mather said for his day, "Blessed be God, that we have Christ preached so much and so well in New England;" and to "preach Christ" has always been one of our most distinguishing characteristics. Christ has always been dear to his ministers and children; and, from the second century, the *Tersanctus* and the *Gloria in Excelsis* have been sung in morning and evening devotions, in families, churches and cathedrals, sounding along the galleries of time with increasing volume adown the ages, in loftiest adoration and praise of the Second Person.

We are told, again, that "modern thought" requires a change in our theology. But what is "modern thought?" Who can define it? The phrase is popular, but it is indefinite and misleading. It was a modern thought with David Hume, that miracles are impossible, because he said, "It is more likely that human testimony should be false than that a miracle should be true." But the world has long since seen that his "modern thought" is a sophism. There must always be a possibility of miracles, for God can always perform them; but whether they have been wrought in modern times depends on evidence, and

that evidence has never been furnished. On the contrary, telegraphy and telephony, though "modern thoughts," are good ones, because their utility is proved every day. "Modern thoughts" are good for nothing unless they can be proved to be useful. Thus the doctrine of "probation after death" is not only worthless but highly dangerous, unless it can be proved to be true; and one or two isolated and doubtful tests are not sufficient proof when the whole current of the Word of God is against it. No theory, however "modern," is to be admitted into our creeds until it is proved to be sound. The fact that we stand on the shoulders of all past generations and can see farther than they did, does not prove that we can see farther into a millstone than they did. There are some who seem to hold that all "modern thoughts" must be accepted as gospel, whether there is any proof for them or not; and there are many others who are of the opinion that there are quite as many unsound reasoners in the world now as there ever have been.

It should be further noted in general, that the errors which are just now afflicting the churches are a resurrection of departed heresies, and that they will depart again. They are spotted; and, like photographs in a rogues' gallery, that will identify them when they appear again.

But better times are coming. There are indications that public sentiment, after a suspended animation of nearly half a century, is beginning to awake and to demand a sound faith and faithful ministrations in the pulpit. What means it that there are here and there clergymen who, by management, have secured a settlement for themselves, but who, by their theological vagaries, have fixed upon themselves the stigma of unsoundness, notwithstanding their indorsement by ecclesiastical councils? What means it, too, that ecclesiastical councils are beginning to refuse to ordain men because of their unsoundness, who have passed through a regular course of instruction in our theological seminaries?[1] What means it, when Congregational

[1] The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, at its recent session in Springfield, Ill., made the following timely and remarkable "deliverance" — the like of it was probably never before addressed to Professors in theological seminaries: "In view of the crude and dangerous utterances of many of the secular and religious papers, periodicals, and books, and of some of the pulpits of the land, resulting from the introduction and prevalence of German mysticism and higher criticism and of philosophic speculation and so-called scientific evolution; in view of the alarming defection from the faith of the gospel, both in this country and abroad, which seriously threatens our church; and in view of the fact that the revealed word of God, the Holy Scripture, is the only infallible rule

ministers, to find refuge, escape into Independency, only there to be met, *in limine*, by a decided popular ostracism? And what means the earthquake created by the *imbroglio* at Andover but an uprising of public sentiment, which loudly demands of trustees, and professors, and students strict fidelity to our standard of doctrine? These and similar indications of the public feeling show with what invincible tenacity and holy jealousy our ancestral faith is still held and guarded by the Christian community.

The truth is, that we all need to have our consciences faithfully probed every Sabbath day. We need to have the human side of theology held in abeyance for awhile, and the *Divine* side of the Gospel presented in a succession of sermons from Sabbath to Sabbath; and were that faithfully done, we should see our congregations aroused and startled as if a bolt from heaven fell into the sanctuary. The world would feel that a new dispensation had come, and that the blessed revivals of fifty years ago were about to revisit the churches, and save the country and save the world. Said a discerning Christian: "We shall have a revival now — our minister has begun to preach from Romans." Yes; we vitally need that searching style of pulpit fidelity, which, under the preaching of EDWARDS at Enfield, so electrified the audience that they sprang to their feet in terror, and seized hold of the balusters of the pews to save themselves from sinking into hell; we need more of that preaching of Christ and Him crucified which made the ministry of the eloquent GRIFFIN one "scene of Divine wonders;" more of that ardent zeal for the immediate conversion of men which glowed in the heart of PAYSON, and which daily said: "Give me Portland or I die;" more of the holy earnestness of BRAINERD, which so impressed the Indians in New Jersey that they dropped their tomahawks and cried: "Gutummakaulumeh," "Gutummakaulumeh," — "Have mercy upon me," "Have mercy upon me;" and more of the discriminating style of NETTLETON, which lays open the sinner's heart to his own astonished view, and pursues him, with persistent

---

of faith and practice — we recommend that this Assembly, in the name of the great Head of the Church, solemnly warn all who give instruction in our theological seminaries against inculcating any views or adopting any methods which may tend to unsettle faith in the doctrine of the divine origin and plenary inspiration of the Scriptures held by our church, or in our Presbyterian system of doctrines, either by ignoring or depreciating the supernatural element in divine revelation, or by exalting human conjecture and speculation above historical and divine facts and truths, or by applying hypotheses of evolution, unverified and incapable of verification, to the word of the living God."

earnestness, through all his excuses and windings and doublings, till he surrenders at the feet of Jesus.

But while a part of the clergy of our country, after all their pretensions, can give us no proof that they have made any "progress in theology," and are preaching in a very perfunctory manner, there is another part — and much the largest part, I trust — who firmly hold all the doctrines of our Confession, and preach them with great fidelity. But there is doubtless room for improvement along the whole line. For nearly half a century we have been drifting away from the true foundation. Good and true men are alarmed; and the bugle-blast is now heard from the East and the West and the North and the South: "HALT! SOUND THE RETREAT TO THE POSITIONS OF SCRIPTURE."

Tone up, then, the theological seminaries to the foundation on which they were originally based. Tone up the pulpit to the Pauline standard. Tone up the pew to the cordial acceptance of every article of our Confession. Tone up the children in the family and the Sabbath-school by the use of the Catechism, as was done a hundred years ago. Take courage, brethren. Hakluyt tells us that Columbus sailed westward week after week and month after month "with the comfortable thought that the land must have a beginning where the sea has an ending." Take courage, then. The sound conservatism of the New England heart and the New England head and the old New England piety will, I trust, ere long, by the grace of God, bring back the theology of New England to the platform of Edwards and the fathers. Let right reason ascend the throne. The true faith will yet triumph. "The good time coming" will certainly arrive.

"The groans of nature in this nether world,
Which heaven has heard for ages, have an *end*,
Foretold by prophets and by poets sung,
The time of rest, the promised Sabbath comes.
Six thousand years of error have well-nigh
Fulfilled their tardy and disastrous course
Over this sinful world; and what remains
Of this tempestuous state of human things
Is merely as the working of a sea,
Before a calm, that rocks itself to rest."

NOTE.

THERE is a popular impression that the receipts of the benevolent societies which are supported wholly or principally by the Congregational churches are annually increasing, and it is often cited as proof of the soundness of the pulpit and of the devotedness of the pew. To place this matter in its true light before the public, the regular cash receipts for the last twenty years of several of the most important societies have been obtained from official sources, and are here presented in a tabulated form. The tables may also be of service to clergymen and others for the purpose of reference.

THE AMERICAN BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS.

Year.	*Amount.*	*Year.*	*Amount.*
1863	$397,079.71	1873	$431,844.81
1864	531,985.67	1874	478,256.51
1865	534,763.33	1875	476,028.19
1866	446,942.44	1876	465,442.40
1867	437,884.77	1877	441,391.45
1868	535,838.64	1878	482,204.73
1869	525,214.95	1879	351,946 81
1870	461,058.42	1880	430,752.46
1871	429,160.60	1881	351,214.10
1872	445,824.23	1882	462,271.21

It will be seen by this table, that the receipts for 1882 were $69,000 *less* than they were in 1864; $72,000 less than in 1865; $73,000 less than in 1868; $62,000 less than in 1869. The *éclat* of the meeting at Portland was not over actual, but over prospective, receipts. It will also be seen that, as stated in the last *Report* of the Board, "the receipts for several years have averaged only about $450,000," and that is true, also, of the whole term of the twenty years covered by the table. The enlarged operations of the Board, which were clearly necessitated by the increasing calls for missionary labor in various parts of the world, which were authorized at several annual meetings, and for which the churches failed to furnish the necessary means, compelled the Prudential Committee to eke out their benevolence by appropriating from the Otis legacy $166,459.15 in 1879, $182,787.05 in 1880, $240,031.06 in 1881, and $189,705.63 in 1882. The Presbyterians withdrew from the Board in 1871, and we get a clew to the amount of their donations by the fact that, before their departure, for each of four years represented in the table the receipts were less than they were in 1882. Fortunately, in consequence of the great reduction in the rate of exchange, the Board have been enabled to do more work with less money than they could do fifteen or twenty years ago, but it is the only institution represented in these schedules which is obliged to make its payments in gold or its equivalents. Their regular cash receipts, including all ordinary legacies and excluding one or two very large ones like the Otis legacy, and also some additions to the permanent funds, have increased in hardly any appreciable degree for nearly twenty years. The population and wealth of the country have largely increased, but the

regular donations have, on an average, stood nearly still. And yet it is probably true, that Congregationalists give, and have always given, more money to benevolent objects, according to their wealth and numbers, than any other denomination in this country. They have been from the beginning essentially a missionary body, and the Landing on Plymouth Rock and the Haystack at Williamstown are immortal emblems of their consecration to this work.

It was expected when the Woman's Boards of Missions were formed, some twelve years ago, that such auxiliaries would largely increase the receipts, but they have not been increased at all. They average no more now than they did before the "Woman's Boards" were organized. The ladies have labored with a degree of zeal worthy of all praise. Last year they raised and paid into the treasury of the Board $111,523 33, and yet the aggregate receipts of the Board, for immediate use, did but slightly exceed the average receipts for twenty years past. The ladies probably give more, but the gentlemen less. The gentlemen seem to say, each for himself, "Oh, my wife is very enthusiastic; I guess she will give about enough for us both."

THE AMERICAN HOME MISSIONARY SOCIETY.

Their cash receipts were as follows:

Year.	*Amount.*	*Year.*	*Amount.*
1863	$164,884.29	1873	$267,691.42
1864	195,537.89	1874	290,120.34
1865	186,847.50	1875	308,896.82
1866	221,191.85	1876	310,027.62
1867	212,567.63	1877	293,712.62
1868	217,577.25	1878	284,486.44
1869	244,390.96	1879	273,691.53
1870	283,102.87	1880	266,720.41
1871	246,567.26	1881	290,953.72
1872	294,566.86	1882	340,778.47

The average of the above receipts for twenty years is nearly $252,000 annually. The receipts for 1882 were unusually large, but, with that exception, the table shows but a small increase for seventeen years.

THE AMERICAN MISSIONARY ASSOCIATION.

The receipts are shown below:

Year.	*Amount.*	*Year.*	*Amount.*
1863	$57,401.68	1873	$345,277.03
1864	95,395.83	1874	344,085.45
1865	134,181.18	1875	273,533.12
1866	253 045.98	1876	264,709.03
1867	334,582.59	1877	209,695.26
1868	354,920.25	1878	195,601.65
1869	367,895.86	1879	215,431.17
1870	420,769.03	1880	240,101.81
1871	366,824.82	1881	167,578.96
1872	329,938.93	1882	297,584.45

This Association was formed in 1846, more particularly to benefit the Mendi people on the coast of Africa; but, upon the emancipation of the colored race in this country, occasioned by the civil war, it turned its attention to their enlightenment. For several years its progress was enthusiastic and rapid. To use the musical figure and language of their Secretary for New England, "its receipts went up in a kind of

crescendo till 1870, and then went down in a pretty regular *diminuendo.*" The popular impression is, that its course has been unusually prosperous from the beginning to the present time. A slight examination of the table will correct that impression.

THE AMERICAN EDUCATION AND COLLEGIATE SOCIETY.

The receipts of this Society have been as follows:

Year.	*Amount.*	*Year.*	*Amount.*
1863	$21,763.77	1873	$33,379.83
1864	32,586.09	1874	27,628.12
1865	23,386.24	1875	31,355.69
1866	21,613.81	1876	31,150.85
1867	19,572.26	1877	23,419.21
1868	18,292.74	1878	27,633.11
1869	21,398.56	1879	25,810.29
1870	27,120.55	1880	25.114.32
1871	27,290.15	1881	26,317.16
1872	32,742.95	1882	28,586.18

These receipts have been remarkably uniform, but the receipts for 1882 were not so large as they were in 1864. There is certainly nothing in this showing which lends any support to the theory that our benevolence is constantly increasing. On the contrary, it proves that, like most of our benevolent societies, it is nearly or quite stationary.

In 1874 the Collegiate Society was united with the American Education Society by Act of the Legislature of Massachusetts. Its receipts, since the union, are the following:

Year.	*Amount.*	*Year.*	*Amount.*
1875	$62,357.43	1879	$63,805.18
1876	38,691.93	1880	64,097.47
1877	34,516.39	1881	256,168.53
1878	69,854,51	1882	92,815.13

These receipts fluctuate widely. The large sum contributed to this Society in 1881 is a part of the generous gift received from the Stone estate, and the receipts generally show some advance.

AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY.

The receipts were as follows:

Year.	*Amount.*	*Year.*	*Amount.*
1863	$24,344.31	1873	$41,458.27
1864	25,926.73	1874	21,796.94
1865	21,655.53	1875	31,179.64
1866	31,019.39	1876	33,474.85
1867	29,747.35	1877	33,583.04
1868	25,704.79	1878	24,502.17
1869	33,223.62	1879	27,486.34
1870	22,930.23	1880	28,249.61
1871	23,297.35	1881	26,387.72
1872	42,367.74	1882	Not obtained.

The receipts of this Society show great uniformity, and of course little or no progress.

Year.	*Amount.*	*Year.*	*Amount.*
1863	$11,688.47	1873	$15,577.14
1864	10,562.34	1874	30,783.87
1865	12,869.14	1875	12,146.53
1866	9,000.00	1876	9,219.26
1867	15,968.62	1877	7,053.16
1868	12,545.08	1878	11,831.96
1869	12,314.96	1879	11,111.39
1870	12,163.63	1880	15,332.93
1871	12,315.67	1881	10,425.50
1872	5,615.12	1882	9,057.05

This table shows large fluctuations, but on the whole no advance. The increase in 1874 was owing to the unusually large legacies which were received, and not to any special improvement in the contributions of the churches.

These authentic exhibits prove most conclusively that the regular annual contributions of the Congregational churches for missionary purposes have increased but slightly for twenty years. They make short work of the theory that the pulpit is unusually sound, and that the churches are unusually benevolent. Objectors may nibble away at the figures, but the stern and humiliating facts still remain. Many other objects have indeed called for and received the assistance of the churches, and, in like manner, many others were aided before the period covered by these tables, which long since passed away. For instance, the Prison Discipline Society, the Boston Seaman's Friend Society, the Doctrinal Tract Society, the American Peace Society, and others, which were once liberally supported, have either ceased to exist or have only a "name to live."

I have by no means forgotten the glowing statements of the Rev. Dr. Dorchester, in his *Problem of Religious Progress*, of the triumphant march of Christianity over all the earth. I fervently hope that all those statements are well founded; but whether they are or not, they in no way affect the position established by these tables, which have reference only to the Congregational churches. The societies reviewed here are among our oldest and most beloved. They have been conducted with unquestioned fidelity and good judgment, and are the best pecuniary test we have of the moral state of the churches. Platform eloquence and platform promises will do something, but spasmodic efforts are usually attended with only spasmodic results. Custom will give something, and pride will give something, but piety is by far the principal donor; and the measure of the piety is very nearly the measure of the donations. The membership of the churches seems to have approached its maximum several years ago, and so did their contributions to the missionary enterprises of the period. We gain nothing but credit for dissimulation by attempting to blink these facts out of sight. It is clear, then, that only a revival of religion of great power which shall sweep over the land and largely increase the piety and the number of the donors, can give the much needed impetus to the missionary movements of the day. "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." Napoleon said, "An army that remains in its intrenchments is beaten;" and One greater than Napoleon commands out of heaven the leaders of the Sacramental Host, saying, "*Speak unto the children of Israel that they* GO FORWARD."